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M.T.A. Makes Deal for Cellphone Service in Underground Stations

By WILLIAM NEUMAN

All 277 underground stations in the subway system are to be wired for cellphone use, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority announced yesterday.

But riders may have to talk fast, because the subway tunnels will not be wired, out of consideration for riders who do not want to be stuck in a subway car full of chattering cellphone users.

The company that won the

right to wire the stations, Transit Wireless, will pay New York City Transit a minimum of \$46.8 million over 10 years, the agency said. The company will also pay the full cost of building the wireless network in the underground stations, estimated at \$180 million.

Under the agreement, cellphone providers would pay the company a fee to carry their signals on the network.

The cellphone network will

start in six downtown Manhattan stations in two years. Once it is shown to be working properly, Transit Wireless will have four more years to outfit the rest of the underground stations.

Under the agreement, the first six stations are to be those at 23rd Street and 14th Street on the Eighth Avenue line, 14th Street on the Seventh Avenue line, 14th Street on the Sixth Avenue line, and Eighth Avenue and Sixth Avenue on the L line.

A public outcry after August floods stalled many subways.

All areas of the stations, including entryways, mezzanines, platforms and transfer passages, will be wired. The system will be designed to allow a seamless con-

nection between the train and street level, so that users will not lose calls as they move in or out of the stations, according to Gary Simpson, president of Nab Construction, a Queens company that is a partner in the wireless venture.

Transit officials have debated whether to wire the subway system for cellphones over the last three years. Four bids were received from companies interested in building the underground

network in January 2005. Officials said yesterday that wiring the stations would help riders during emergencies, like the flooding that knocked out much subway service last month.

At the time many riders complained that they were unable to get information about why trains were not running and could not call their workplaces or families to let them know where they were.

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"The idea is people can stay connected," said Paul J. Fleurbaey, a spokesman for the transit agency.

Some riders have found that they can use their cellphones in many areas of the subway system already. Cellphone signals leak into parts of many stations through street grates or entranceways. People regularly talk on cellphones in trains and on platforms on the elevated lines.

Riders interviewed yesterday were split on the idea of opening up every station to cellphone talk, text messaging, e-mail access and other aspects of a wireless world.

"I think it's great because if there's an emergency, you want to be able to get in touch with someone, or call your boss if you're running late," said Susan Cohen, 54, a buyer for a women's clothing company who lives on the Upper East Side and regularly takes the No. 6 train on the Lexington line.

"People talk on cellphones everywhere," she said, "so why not the subway?"

But Karol Ledworowski, 28, a student who lives in Tudor City, thought it was unnecessary. "You can wait until you leave the station to make a phone call or receive a message," he said. And he worried that terrorists could use cellphone signals to detonate a bomb underground.

Security experts have said that there are greater advantages in wiring stations so that people can call the authorities in an emergency or to report suspicious activity.

Cellphone wiring is becoming more common in transit systems around the nation, including

Kate Hammer contributed reporting.



When flooding hit the subways last month, many New York City riders were frustrated in their attempts to use cellphones.

A pact that still needs to be approved by the authority's board.

Washington.

Transit Wireless is a joint venture involving Nab Construction, Q-Wireless, Dianet Communications and Transit Technologies. Nab Construction and Transit Technologies have done other

large-scale construction projects in the subway system, and Dianet has been involved in designing and installing cellphone antenna systems in buildings and airports. Q-Wireless makes software for wireless systems.

Transit officials said they chose Transit Wireless in part because it offered to pay more to the authority than the others. One bidder, American Tower, offered a total 10-year payment of \$6.2 million. A consortium of the major cellphone providers, including

Verizon Wireless and Sprint Nextel, offered a total payment over 10 years of just \$40, according to a summary of the deal that will be provided to the authority's board members. (A transit official said the figure was not a typo.)

Transit Wireless initially made an offer of \$34.4 million, but it increased the offer during negotiations.

The proposal will be submitted for approval to the board of the authority next week. Peter S. Kalikow, the board chairman, said he

would vote to approve the agreement and expected that other board members would, too.

Mr. Kalikow said that he did not like the idea of people having conversations inside the train, but that allowing cellphones on platforms was an acceptable compromise.

"It wasn't what I really liked, but the public seems to want it," he said. "If it remains on the platform, I would imagine the inconvenience quotient will be low."

Subways to Get Cellular Service

Every underground station in the New York City subway system will be wired for cellphone use within six years, transit officials announced.

But riders may have to talk fast, because the tunnels will not be wired.

The company that won the right to wire the stations will pay at least \$46.8 million over 10 years, and will pay to build the network.

In interviews, riders were split on the idea of opening up every station to cellphone talk, text messaging, e-mail access and other aspects of a wireless world.

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